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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet is designed to help parents lobby for state-level funding of gifted programs. Suggestions for making telephone calls and writing letters to representatives and senators are offered along with sample scripts for a telephone call and a letter. A description of the 15-step legislative process for gifted education bills in Illinois is included as well as a description of Illinois Council for the Gifted (ICG) Advocacy Days during which advocates personally lobby in the state capital for gifted legislation. (DC)

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STATE GIFTED ADVOCACY

A GUIDE

FOR

PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COORDINATORS

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Written by

Trevor T. Steinbach

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State Advocacy means the difference between a gifted program in the neighborhood school or no program in the neighborhood school. In most school districts in Illinois, it is only with the state funds that any program exists. No matter how committed the local district may be, it is the state funds which guarantee the supplies, materials, and teacher to be there. Unfortunately, the State Legislature does work not against gifted education, but is not as in favor of it as we would like it to be. It is the goal of this pamphlet to assist you in helping your child's local program and all children's local programs gain the needed funding.

In my experience in advocating for the ICG, I have found that it takes very little to change a legislator's mind towards voting for gifted education. Most legislators have not made up their minds pro or con on the issue of gifted funding. They look to the local populus to inform them how to vote. 30 phone calls and 30 letters to each legislator in the House and Senate is a large volume of mail/information to a legislator. Usually, he or she will vote pro-gifted with this volume of mail. The problem is what to write and who to write. Currently, most gifted people are not politically active. We are at the same point that Special Education parents were 10 years ago. We need to be politically active to get what we want for our children. This activity must be focused by you at your individual legislators. Your first step is to learn the numbers of your voting district. It is on your voter's registration card. Second, learn the names of your Representatives and Senator. In 1982, the entire state will be reapportioned and legislative districts will change. Keep track every 2 years (even numbered years) of who wins from your district. Almost all legislators have a local office. Obtain that phone number and call them at their local office. You don't

need to call Springfield if you don't want to. When you call, convey the following type of information.

Sample phone call:

Hello, I'm (your name). I am a registered voter in (Senator) (Representative)_____'s district. I am concerned about gifted legislation and how the (Senator) (Representative) will vote. My son/daughter is in _____ school in ____ district. I would appreciate a personal letter from Representative/Senator _____ informing me of his voting intentions in regards to House Bill (# of Bill) . My name is spelled (your name) , my address is _____. I'd appreciate hearing from him prior to the House/Senate vote on this bill. Thank you. Goodbye.

The above conversation has:

1. Given the person the Bill you're concerned with;
2. Given the person how you expect him/her to vote;
3. Asked for a written reply stating publicly how he/she intends to vote;
4. Informed him/her that you are a registered voter, implying that he/she could lose votes in the next election if he/she votes against your child!
5. By mentioning the local school and local school district you imply that he/she is voting for aid to schools in his/her legislative district.

Sample Letter to Legislator:

The Honorable Representative/Senator _____
State Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Representative/Senator_____,

(Paragraph I.) Inform the Senator/Representative of the fact that:

1. You are a voting member of his/her district
2. You are concerned about local gifted education in the legislative district. Elaborate on the local program your child participates in.

(Paragraph II.) Tell the Senator/Representative what you want from him/her.

1. I would like you to vote ____ way on House Bill (exact number of the bill that year.)
2. Tell him/her you are concerned and others are concerned from his/her district. Remember, Gifted is a "hot" issue.
3. Be very detailed in the action. The amounts of money the bill should? have and the concerns you have for this.

(Paragraph III.) Ask the Senator/Representative to send you a written reply to your letter, informing you as to how he/she feels about the issue and how he/she will vote!

Sincerely yours,
(your name)

Sample Letter:

The Honorable Senator Claghorn
State Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Senator Claghorn,

I am very concerned about gifted education in our legislative district 41. As a registered voter, I appreciated your positive vote for gifted bill 3065 last year. My local school, Bill Hill School, has an excellent gifted program which my son John Jr. enjoys very much. This program has really assisted my son educationally.

At this time, I am writing you in regards to House Bill 494, which includes gifted funding between lines 22-29. Many of the parents at Bill Hill School are concerned that the program

and our children's education will not be as good without the state appropriation to our local district. I feel that the bill should increase the amount of funding for gifted students to $100 per child. This increase to $7.86 million on line 24 of the bill would greatly assist our local district with supplies and materials vital to the gifted program.

Would you please write me, giving me your views toward gifted funding and your voting intention toward House Bill 494.

Sincerely yours,
John Smith, Sr.
John Smith, Sr.

The previous letter was Informing, Telling, and Asking for specific details. This type of one-page letter is crucial if you are to inform the Senator/Representative how he/she should act.

Both phone calls and letters should be done between April 15 and May 15 of the year. It is at this point that the House Bill moves to the floor of the House for voting, is passed on to the Senate for voting and ends up on the Governor's desk for signing.

The Legislative process for Gifted bills and all other education bills is:

1. Bill is reported to floor of House;
2. Bill is assigned to House Appropriations Committee;
3. Bill is assigned to House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Education;
4. SubCommittee holds public hearings. Anyone can come and talk about how they feel on Gifted to the SubCommittee. Hearings are held in the late afternoon in Springfield in the Capitol Building in April. Amendments in SubCommittee can raise or lower Gifted funding.
5. Bill reported to entire committee. Committee can kill the Bill or pass it to the entire House.

6. Bill is then read 2 times on the floor of the House. Representatives can amend up or down on Gifted funding;
7. Upon the third reading, the House passes the Bill and it goes on to the Senate or kills it and there is no gifted funding;
8. Bill (hopefully) arrives in the Senate;
9. Senate assigns the Bill to the Appropriations Committee;
10. The Appropriations Committee has public hearings on the bill during the middle of May;
11. Amendments can increase or decrease gifted funding in the committee;
12. Upon the third reading, the Senate votes for the bill and it goes to the Governor or kills all gifted funding by voting the bill down;
13. If the bill then goes to the Governor, he can:
    a. Pass the bill;
    b. Kill the bill;
    c. Amendatory veto the bill--he can reduce the funding level for gifted education and pass the bill at a funding level.
14. The bill (hopefully) becomes law;
15. On July 1 of that year, the local school district can begin spending the money for that year's gifted program.

As you can see, there are a lot of places where gifted funding can be increased, decreased, or totally cut. It is only through phone calls and letters that we can guarantee a priority for gifted education.

Besides letters and phone calls, another way to assist gifted education is through ICG Advocacy Days. Every year, three or four days are designated to the membership through the newsletter for talking to legislators in Springfield. Any-

one can participate. We meet at 9 AM on legislative days at the statue of Miss Illinois in the Capitol Rotunda, Ground Floor. From there, you are given a training session in contacting legislators. We then talk to legislators during the day, informing them about gifted education and the House Bill that year.

The ICG Advocacy Hotline provides up-to-date information Monday-Friday 8AM-5PM from April 1-July1 each year. This legislative hotline is at (312) 759-7182. Call it weekly to find out what is happening to the gifted bill.